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## Review of Buffalo Guns & Barbed Wire: Two Frontier Accounts by Don Hampton Biggers

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*Buffalo Guns & Barbed Wire: Two Frontier Accounts by Don Hampton Biggers.* Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 1991. Introduction, notes, plates. xix + 241 pp. \$39.95.

The killing of the buffalo herds and introduction of domestic livestock was the pivotal ecological event in the recent history of the

Great Plains. Don Biggers, a pioneer West Texas journalist, collected eyewitness accounts and produced *History That Will Never Be Repeated* and *Pictures of the Past*, published in 1901 and 1902 respectively. These valuable and lively books are now republished, along with diamond-sharp photographs from the same era, an introduction, and a brief biography of Biggers, under the title *Buffalo Guns & Barbed Wire*.

*Pictures of the Past* describes the destruction, during the 1870s in West Texas, of the great free-roaming herds of American bison. For this account Biggers had to rely on witnesses and statistics; using materials since lost, he gives us vivid narratives of the buffalo-hide bonanza, which boomed and "busted" between 1871 and 1878. "As Told by Old Timers," a chapter comprising half the book, conveys perfectly the hunters' attitudes and experiences and the hard conditions of their trade. Six photographs by George Robertson document the men and their dress and equipment against a grassland far different from West Texas today.

*History That Will Never Be Repeated* covers a period (from 1874 to 1901) that saw the evolution of the cattle "industry" from wild open-range conditions toward owned or leased pastures, windmills, and fence-controlled grazing. Biggers' frank bias is with the cattlemen, but his open-eyed report permits independent conclusions; one cannot read "Great Die-Ups" or "The Great Boom of 1882" without distress. Ten photographs by Erwin E. Smith show cowboy life amid the natural beauty of Texas rangeland. The craftsmanship behind these superbly detailed photographs provides welcome contrast to Biggers' writing style, which is entertaining at its best but slapdash in some passages. The book's final chapter names turn-of-the-century cattlemen; the list, long and tedious as the Begats, is important historically.

*Pictures* is the more carefully written of the two books, less weighted with the author's country-editor prose. One would love to hold Don Biggers' ragtag original, composed in a

rush by a fistfighting journalist who took all the pains he could afford, but it is vanishingly rare. This fine letterpress edition is a delight to handle. Highly recommended.

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